



## 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Law Day Essay Contest Features Theme, "Equality Before the Law"

# Nebraska Judicial News

June 2009

Special Events Publication of the Nebraska Supreme Court



Justice Kenneth Stephan (center back) and Bar Foundation President Robert Berkshire (right back) with student essay winners' (front) Mark Lutkemeier and Hannah Opfer, (back) Kathryn Vampola, Ethan Steiner, Brooklyn Swantek, and Katie Nelson.

On a bright spring day, April 23, the Supreme Court and the Nebraska State Bar Foundation welcomed winners of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Law Day Essay Contest and their guests to a special recognition luncheon at the Governor's Residence in Lincoln. The six students, representing grades 7 through 12, were honored for their writing skills, which addressed a question related to the Gettysburg Address:

*How does the United States' legal system promote the ideals expressed*

*by President Abraham Lincoln in the first sentence of the Gettysburg Address given on November 19, 1863? "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."*

Representing the Court, Justice Kenneth C. Stephan joined Bar Foundation President Robert H. Berkshire of Omaha in congratulating the student essayists

Lancaster County Judge Jean Lovell and her Taiwanese Rotary exchange guest, Pei-Chun Chen, speak with fellow Rotarian, Judge Arlen Beam.



*The theme for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Law Day as set by the American Bar Association:*

*"A Legacy of Liberty: Celebrating Lincoln's Bicentennial"*

The 2009 Law Day luncheon, with Master of Ceremonies Kile Johnson (behind podium) was held at the Governor's Residence.

and their teachers and presenting them with certificates of achievement and gifts from the Foundation. Ethan Steiner, Hartington Public School, was the 7<sup>th</sup> grade contest winner, and Brooklyn Swantek, McCool Junction Public School, was the winner from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Hannah Opfer, Blair High School, won the 9<sup>th</sup> grade award, and Katie Nelson from Omaha's Duchesne Academy won the 10<sup>th</sup> grade prize. Kathryn Vampola, daughter of Judge Kenneth Vampola, was the 11<sup>th</sup> grade winner. She represented Arlington High School.

The senior winner, Mark Lutkemeier of Roseland's Silver Lake High School, also won the McGrath North Mullin & Kratz Scholarship to attend the National Student Leadership Conference to be held on a major college campus this summer. Lutkemeier's

essay concluded the following in tying our legal system with the ideals expressed by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address:

*When we hear an attempt to demonize judges or justices with whom we disagree, we should remember this shared commitment to the rule of law. Our heritage should inspire us to fight attacks on an independent judiciary—whether they come from the left or the right. It is difficult, but important, to our judicial system that the laws are applied the same to all citizens, regardless of income level, age, gender, race or religion.*

Lutkemeier also won the Law Day Essay Contest as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader.

Bar Foundation Vice President Kile W. Johnson was master of ceremonies for the luncheon. Members of the Foundation's PEOPLE (Public Education and Outreach Promoting Law & Equity) Committee wrote the essay question and also judged the contest. Committee members who volunteered to assist in judging the essays were

Judge Lyle E. Strom, PEOPLE Committee Co-chair







Tom Keefe, PEOPLE Committee Co-chair  
Larry Karel  
Judge Tom Otepka  
Judge Richard Sievers  
Judge Donna Taylor  
Judge Frankie Moore  
Patrick Borchers  
Mike Kinney  
Terry Waite



In keeping with the Law Day Essay Contest theme, "Equality Before the Law," the Court and the Foundation sponsored an afternoon presentation by Boston actress Elena Dodd in the Supreme Court at the Capitol. Dodd portrayed Eleanor Roosevelt in a re-enactment titled, "Meet Eleanor Roosevelt: Advocate for Universal Human Rights." Judge Sievers introduced the program before a standing-room-only audience, which included a Law & Literature class from Lincoln's Southeast High School.



An American History class from Johnson-Brock High School participated in the program via a Web-based distance learning connection. Johnson-

## Nebraska Judicial Branch

Online at:

[www.supremecourt.ne.gov](http://www.supremecourt.ne.gov)

*Photos, top to bottom:*

*Judge Richard Sievers (behind podium), member of the Foundation's PEOPLE Committee, welcomes crowd to the Nebraska Supreme Court.*

*Lincoln Southeast High School student Maria Hopkins (left) and teacher Johnna Graff—2004 UNL Law School graduate—put finishing touches on introduction for "Eleanor Roosevelt."*

*Guest, Elena Dodd (right center), speaks with (l to r) Liz Willborn, Public Policy Center; Actress Pippa Lawson; and UNL College of Law Professor Craig Lawson (right).*

*Duven Penner (left) of ESU 5 discusses 'learning cart' technology with Janet Bancroft and PEOPLE Committee Co-Chair Tom Keefe, while connecting to the Johnson-Brock classroom.*



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*"Eleanor Roosevelt" gives presentation from the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom.*



Brock students, as well as students in the Lincoln audience, were able to ask questions of "Mrs. Roosevelt" and also of the actress as herself, once she removed the Eleanor Roosevelt signature hat and gloves.

Johnson-Brock teacher Lori Broady commented, "We loved doing it. We have participated in a few of these events before and our kids are very receptive to the process. Elena Dodd was wonderful! The kids certainly

gained a lot from the experience...as did I!"

Dodd's performance was also underwritten by Thomson Reuters and the Nebraska Humanities Council.

More information about the Law Day activities may be found on the Bar Foundation's Web site at [www.nebarfnd.org](http://www.nebarfnd.org). Information about the history of Law Day may be found on the American Bar Association's Web site, [www.lawday.org](http://www.lawday.org).

*Law-Related Education Consultant for the State Bar Foundation, Cindy Lilleoien (back right), introduces "Eleanor Roosevelt" to students prior to presentation.*

State Capitol  
P.O. Box 98910  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
Phone: 402-471-3205  
Fax: 402-471-2197  
E-mail:  
[janet.bancroft@nebraska.gov](mailto:janet.bancroft@nebraska.gov)



## Annual Law Day Celebration

The Law Day Essay Contest and Law Day Luncheon are jointly sponsored by the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, its Center for Law-Related Education, and the Nebraska Supreme Court. Each year, on or near May 1, a day is set aside to celebrate and enjoy our freedoms. It focuses on our heritage of liberty under law and how the rule of law makes our democracy possible.